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ABSTRACT

Despite special programs, new technology, curriculum revisions, and compensatory education programs, there has been little improvement in the quality and results of urban education. Better accountability, research, and staff training, all areas in which the urban university can influence public education, are central to the resolution of urban educational problems. While economic and political factors have increased demands for accountability, the ultimate goal should be to improve student learning and development. An effective accountability program should include: (1) joint participation of teachers, administrators, university personnel, parents, students, and community organizations; (2) consideration of all factors that influence learning, and concern with cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes; (3) systematic measurement of objectives; (4) built-in mechanisms for experimentation and improvement of instruction; and (5) self criticism and an adequate reporting system. Educational research, another vehicle for the improvement of urban education, should be treated as the accumulation of experimental results. Researchers and curriculum planners must communicate regarding the results of current research and development activities. Urban universities can also contribute to improved urban education through staff development, including preservice and inservice teacher training, adequate supervision of trainees by people with urban school experience, and the integration of relevant psychological and cultural materials into courses taken by future teachers. (Author/GC)

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Accountability, Research, Staff Training: The Role of the Urban University

Attempts to improve urban school systems have been many and varied. The government has allocated monies for workshops, institutes, special programs, and new materials and equipment. Some universities have attempted to change programs of teacher training. School districts have attempted to reduce class size and inaugurate new reading, math and speech programs. Minority group history was introduced. Some schools began to resemble the Houston Space Center because of their new technological approaches. Districts bussed, decentralized, and created departments to handle special "Title I Schools." Teachers were exhorted to make learning more humane and meaningful and, in a few cases, were even given some help in how this might be accomplished. Still there has been little appreciable improvement in the quality and/or the results of urban education. Achievement scores continue to lag while children and teachers flee the central city schools. School districts continue to search for "the right" program, curriculum, technological advance, or teacher in-service program, yet all involved sink deeper into the morass of frustration and despair. One primary reason why the "innovations" have failed so abysmally is that most of them have been introduced into an already on-going social system with little or no attempt to assess the effects of the "innovation" on the social system. The innovations were introduced in a piecemeal and scatter-gun fashion. They have been, as Janowitz calls them, "segmental" changes. Programs were piled on top of other on-going school programs. Changes in curriculum and program were planned in central institutional frameworks within which the changes could best function. No attempt was

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made to build in mechanisms whereby staff had time to plan for implementation of programs and to re-plan if problems developed. Consequently, the programs caused more havoc than they provided help. In this context, my viewpoints on accountability, research and staff training lend themselves not for immediate solution to all the problems, but to the crux of the situation as it now stands, and some possible suggestions for implementation.

1. The term accountability is a relatively new one in education and has been used in many different ways. When used in connection with a school program, it essentially means that those who are given responsibility for the operation of the school (school board, administrators, teachers) should be held accountable (answerable) for the learning and development of the students. This includes accepting blame for the failure as well as credit for the successes. It may also include explaining why the failures occurred and what is being done to correct the situation. Although teachers, administrators, and school board members have always assumed responsibility for student learning, an accountability program requires some sort of report to the public and possibly to some governmental agency (state department of education) concerning the success of programs. The sudden demand for educational accountability on the part of government officials (national, state, and local), and by taxpayer alike is commonly attributed to such factors as the following:

1. The rising cost of education and the increased tax burden.
2. The public's general loss of confidence in the schools.
3. The increasing demand by the parents of disadvantaged students that greater attention be given to the achievement of their children.
4. The recognition that management techniques used in the accountability programs in government and in industry were adaptable to education.

These and other factors are especially significant in an urban school system with its many complexities.

The ultimate goal of any educational accountability program is to improve learning and instruction. It is just a matter of where the emphasis is placed. In product accountability, it is believed that learning can be best improved by holding teachers responsible for the amount of learning achieved by their students. In process accountability, it is believed that holding teachers responsible for using professionally sound methods will result in the greatest amount of learning and the fewest negative side effects. In experimental accountability, it is believed that learning can be most effectively improved by holding the school staff responsible for systematically trying out and evaluating alternative methods of improving pupil learning. Whatever the type used, it should include the responsibility this directory (accountability and research) to continue monitoring and modifying, as needed, those methods and materials that have been proven to be most effective.

The goals and objectives are basic for accountability programs. Before someone can be held responsible for student learning - a decision must be made concerning what it is that students should be expected to learn. This usually takes the form of general goals for the total school program and more specific learning objectives for each of the various areas of instruction. The latter are typically expressed in behavioral, or performance, terms to clarify the precise nature of the expected learning outcomes. An accountability program poses special problems in specifying and defining the objectives. The main purpose of any accountability program is to improve student learning and development. In light of the many facets of accountability discussed earlier in this paper, my suggestions, as an urban university educator, for an effective

educational accountability program would include:

1. A joint enterprise of teachers, administrators, university personnel, school board members, parents, students, and concerned community groups to participate in specifying the goals and objectives of the school program in determining the roles and responsibilities of each group and in deciding how the accountability program is to operate.
2. A program that would take into account all factors influencing learning when assigning responsibility for students' educational growth.
3. A program concerned with all important educational objectives: one which would include all cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes of the school program.
4. A program based upon objectives being stated in measurable terms. Tests and other evaluation instruments can then be selected or developed that are most appropriate for the specified learning outcomes. You should select the type of evaluation instrument that measures each type of learning outcome most directly, thus a comprehensive evaluation system would be necessary. To obtain meaningful measures of students' gain of achievement, it would also be necessary to use psychemetric and statistical techniques that will separate the real learning gains from the distortions produced by various contaminating factors.
5. A program with a built-in mechanism for the continuous improvement of instruction and learning. There would be some type of diagnostic-feedback-corrections system which would provide an adjustment for the learning failures that occur. The immediate aim would be to improve the learning of the current group of students, but the long-range goal would be the general improvement of the instructional program.

6. A program that would provide freedom for teachers to experiment with new methods and materials. This requires freedom to set up experimental programs in the school and sufficient flexibility in the instructional program to permit the trying out of different classroom procedures.

7. A program that evaluates possible undesirable effects from an accountability program. For instance, students may achieve more arithmetic but learn to dislike school in the process; teachers may begin teaching for the test, or teachers may turn to harsh discipline to obtain better results. All of these are signs that the program is not working as intended, and thus would be considered when monitoring the effectiveness of the program.

8. A program that has an adequate reporting system. This means that the results of the program would be reported to teachers, administrators, students, parents, and other concerned citizens in a form that is easily understood and was most useful for decision making. It would be essential, however, that these reports be in terms that are clear to the layman as well as to the professional educator. This doesn't give us a solution to all the problems, but at least the role of the urban university is more clearly defined as a part of the total process.

II. Research should be treated as the accumulation of experimental results that affect curriculum planning. The research process should be evaluated as it affects educational objectives. There are many problems concerning the availability and use of educational research, but here is where we can make a definite impact on them achieving their goals. Those who stress the need for more research in education contend it is paper-thin in many areas, especially in areas involving

the non-learner and the socially underprivileged. Research, particularly in a large urban school system, must be applied in practice, not merely in theory. It is of little value to have a sophisticated comprehensive curriculum plan in theory and continue to tolerate obsolete practices in the classroom. Another problem is the apparent lack of communication between the researcher and the curriculum worker. The last decade has brought a wealth of new ideas through experimentation and research, but the period has not been marked by effective innovations in learning procedures. Much of this research deals with the disadvantaged student in urban school systems. For example, the knowledgeable researcher has had evidence for some time that students disadvantaged by their environment can be taught by methods that minimize differences in learning and motivation between them and the more advantaged; yet curriculum planners have not been using those methods. Many scholars take a dim view of the untested evidence--gathering techniques used by educational researchers. They are critical of the use of questionnaires, self-inventories, and methodologies of statistics. They also raise questions about the normative and the historic method of much of educational research. They point to the lack of reliable information in such crucial areas as learning rates and attitudes, motivation, quality of instruction, and evaluation of teacher competency. Criticism is further leveled at the efforts of educational researchers to apply scientific measuring techniques to human beings engaged in value-directed activities. This pinpoints the most baffling problem of research in any educational system: How to get valid results, despite the multiplicity of independent factors effecting human behavior. A problem much more difficult to solve in a large urban school system.

Despite the criticism leveled at educational research, there is ample proof of its value and justification for its use. The properties of good research are present if the research is based on the three accepted stages that characterize inquiry in any field. First, the problem should be analyzed to discern basic elements. Second, a survey embracing observation, description and classification should be made. Third, a theory is deductively formulated. In the theory process, inferences are added to facts in order to obtain concepts and testable hypotheses. The curriculum experimentation will vary according to local condition because of the complexity of the urban school system. In this school system there should be trained researchers from the urban university. Many schools throughout the nation are participating in educational acts. More of the grants should be sought. All staff personnel who are involved with the program must be willing to test the results of research and to put into practice the best of tested innovations. An intelligent attitude toward experimentation ought to be basic in educational planning and policy. This means securing capable research people, providing them with facilities, authorizing them to proceed, and then maintaining a close working relationship between them and all concerned with curriculum decision making. Real curriculum improvement would come from intelligent use of research plus careful program planning and skillful implementation of creative ideas.

There is widespread interest by schools, especially in large urban school systems in establishing procedures whereby educational change is based on research and developmental activities. Furthermore, the efforts in many schools to test thoroughly experimental

and innovative practices are themselves of a research and developmental nature. This approach involves these steps: (1) The continuing assessment of needs for change with priorities determined; (2) The development of prototypes or models of innovative instructional procedures or practices--to meet priority needs--frequently in a school setting; (3) The systematic testing of such prototypes in pilot studies, possibly extended as field tests in multiple situations; (4) The continuing modification and re-testing of instructional procedures and practices until confidence can be had in them; and (5) The utilization of refined instructional procedures or practices in appropriate situations, with arrangements for continued observation of them to determine further changes. If the school district used such an approach all these steps would in time be going so simultaneously as different needs are attacked. Research findings can help to eliminate unnecessary curriculum content that takes so much time for pupils to learn that they lack both time and energy to engage in what is called "depth education." You may also use these findings to determine: (1) What instructional content and procedures may students of different interest and talents learn and accomplish by themselves? (2) What types of presentations by a competent teacher who is physically present to make use of television, films, records, or programmed instruction devices? and (3) What content and procedures require personal interaction among students and between students and a teacher? Such an analysis by means of educational research findings of any unit or division of a course as well as the total curriculum, can lead to better understanding by teacher and other staff members of the need for independent study arrangements, large-group instruction, and small-

group discussion. The analysis would help to improve the curriculum in any class regardless of its organization. This is so desperately needed in our large urban school systems.

III. The staff training activities in a large urban school system is not focused as much on its administrators as it is on the teachers. Of all the positions acknowledged in our big city school systems, the one position that carries the least weight in policy discussions has the lowest pay scale and is the most burdened with many of the problems related to urban schools is the teacher. Thus, my emphasis is placed on the training of the big city school teacher by the urban university. Teachers assigned to urban schools, particularly inner-city schools, are generally even more outspoken than teachers of the middle-class students in believing that their college training did not prepare them well for teaching. Partly as a result of inadequate preparation many big city teachers are not able to cope with the special problems of the urban school and either leave teaching or seek transfers to other schools. Other big city teachers manage to achieve control either by maintaining a punitive classroom or by reaching accommodations in which student and teacher make few demands on each other. Neither condition is conducive to learning on the part of the disadvantaged children. Even though programs for training big city teachers tend to be improving, large urban school districts and universities seldom have worked out arrangements to provide for successful induction of new teachers into big city schools. As a result, the new training programs have not begun to have much impact on conditions in these schools. Closely related to the need for better pre-service training is the necessity of providing more and better in-service training for teachers in

big city school districts in general and in the inner-city in particular. Unless teachers already staffing these schools become more effective, better trained teachers coming into a school will have little permanent impact on their students, and will tend to leave the city schools or reduce their level of effort. We can use methods and techniques such as: independent study, large or small-group instruction, non-graded instruction, flexible scheduling, team teaching, educational technology, systems approaches, programmed instruction and all the multi-media approaches known to mankind and still it won't solve most of the problems confronted by these teachers. Workshops conducted by the university should be considered to provide the teachers with a set of basic skills to support any changes made in all areas of the school's social system. If, for example, the ways of treating children were to change, then the attitudes of teachers have to support the idea of change.

If the curriculum was to be altered, then the teachers need to know what the effects of this alteration would mean for them with regard to time allotments and construction of learning experiences. With differentiated staffing being emphasized in many big cities, training activities would include all administrators and other support staff members, but continue to focus upon the main cog in this wheel, the classroom teacher.

In general, the most important elements in a successful program to train staffs for big city schools seem to be: (1) Give the person early experience in big city classrooms or administrative offices before they take their educational methods and theory courses; (2) Talk to college deans or department chairmen and find out what instructors and supervisors have first-hand knowledge of and experience in urban schools, assign your personnel to these people; (3) Suggest

to these colleges and universities the possibility of full-time assignments in your school district during one or more semesters in which professional studies in various disciplines, such as psychology and curriculum are closely integrated with each other and with opportunities to practice teaching skills in the classroom; and (4) Give sufficiently intensive experience in inner-city communities and institutions to allow future teachers to overcome negative stereotypes about disadvantaged students and simplistic expectations which see the disadvantaged student as incapable of learning on the one hand, or needing only love and sympathy on the other. Closely related to these needs is a need for teachers in big city school districts in general and in the inner-city in particular.